UNITED NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/51/6 (Prog. 18)
9 May 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-first session

PROPOSED MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1998-2001

Programme 18. Economic and social development in Western Asia

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18.1 The overall orientation of the programme is to enhance sustainable development in the region, promote regional cooperation and policy coordination and increase awareness of the economic, social, cultural, technological and environmental dimensions of development.

18.2 The mandate of the programme derives from Economic and Social Council resolutions 1818 (LV) of 9 August 1973 and 1985/69 of 26 July 1985, which established and amended the terms of reference of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The secretariat of the Commission is responsible for the implementation of this programme.

18.3 In implementing the programme, ESCWA will continue to identify and design a multidisciplinary approach to regional cooperation within the context of the priorities and programmes of its member States, taking into consideration the aspirations of civil society institutions.

18.4 It is anticipated that, during the period covered by the plan, ESCWA efforts will culminate in the following achievements:

(a) Establishment of the Commission as the major source of statistics and information in the region through the development of databases, information systems and networks pertinent to the work of ESCWA and end-users;

(b) Greater understanding of sustainable human development through defining priorities, formulating plans and undertaking relevant actions;

(c) Improved management of natural resources and environmental protection, enhanced cooperation among member States in the area of energy and greater utilization of renewable energy resources;

(d) Development of the role of ESCWA as the regional catalyst and forum for development through its assistance to member States in coping with the implications of regional and global changes;

(e) Increased cooperation and coordination among member States in harmonizing relevant norms, standards, regulations and definitions, and in adopting relevant regional conventions;

(f) Consolidation and expansion of existing regional coordination mechanisms among United Nations agencies and with other regional organizations;

(g) Provision of effective assistance to the Palestinian National Authority and to countries with special needs, in particular Yemen, the least developed country in the region.

Subprogramme 18.1 Management of natural resources and environment

18.5 The majority of ESCWA member States will face increasingly complex issues related to the development and management of their natural resources as well as addressing serious environmental problems. These issues have to be tackled in the context of increasing intraregional interdependence. The subprogramme, which is implemented by the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division,

is expected to play a catalytic role in regional coordination and cooperation for the management of natural resources, in particular water resources and energy, and the protection of the environment.

18.6 In the area of water, the objectives are:

(a) To promote integrated approaches in order to meet the challenges stemming from a combination of shortage of freshwater resources, deterioration of their quality and a rapid increase in water demand for multi-utilization, viewed in the context of population growth, agricultural land use and socio-economic development;

(b) To contribute to the design and propagation of schemes for more rational utilization and conservation of freshwater resources, taking into consideration the need for increasing public awareness and ensuring community participation in the use of water, implementation of water projects and environmental protection programmes;

(c) To provide effective assistance to member States in the formulation and execution of programmes for capacity-building, as well as diffusion of modern techniques and technologies for the development of both surface and groundwater resources, including non-conventional sources;

(d) To support Governments in their efforts to establish appropriate intraregional and interregional mechanisms for the development and management of shared water basins.

18.7 In the area of energy, the objectives are:

(a) To strengthen the capacity of member States to improve their energy policies and planning methodologies and techniques;

(b) To promote the use of alternative sources of energy;

(c) To contribute to the dissemination of new and renewable energy technologies, mainly as part of integrated rural development in ESCWA countries;

(d) To foster intra- and interregional cooperation in the field of electric energy networks.

18.8 In the area of environment, the objectives are:

(a) To promote environmental awareness and action to address environmental degradation issues in the region;

(b) To strengthen cooperation within the secretariat and with national, regional and international organizations in monitoring, analysing and reporting on emerging environmental issues and conventions, and to follow up on the implementation of Agenda 21, especially those chapters dealing with integration of land and water resource management and conservation;

(c) To promote environmentally sound technologies to achieve sustainable sectoral development with a view to reversing environmental damage and degradation of natural resources, improving the efficiency of resource use, minimizing waste, maximizing recycling and environmental protection, and assessing the environmental impact of transport operations and energy utilization.

Subprogramme 18.2 Improvement of the quality of life

18.9 The rapidly changing global and regional economic conditions pose serious problems in terms of their impact on community cohesion and family structure and values. These have been compounded by the effects of financial constraints to investment in social sectors and the growing problems of urbanization.

18.10 Attempting the resolution of these social problems has to take account of emerging international and regional trends and the globalization of issues pertaining to the improvement of the quality of life.

18.11 Notwithstanding the fact that issues pertaining to the improvement of the quality of life are indivisible and interdependent and will, therefore, be addressed in an interdisciplinary manner in so far as possible, the subprogramme, which is implemented by the Social Development Issues and Policies Division, will seek to achieve objectives related to four specific yet complementary areas pertaining to the improvement of the quality of life: population, human development, advancement of women and human settlements. In that context, the subprogramme will follow up on the implementation and seek to operationalize recommendations relevant to the region emanating from four world conferences, namely, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the World Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

18.12 In the area of population the objectives are:

(a) To enhance the capabilities of countries of the region and their awareness in the areas of methodologies and techniques of demographic analysis, population policies and migration;

(b) To increase awareness and understanding of the population situation, trends, issues and challenges and their interrelationships with sustainable development;

(c) To increase understanding of the linkages between population factors and poverty, human rights and environment.

18.13 In the area of human development, the objectives are:

(a) To promote integrated approaches to rural development and the alleviation of poverty;

(b) To encourage production and income-generating capabilities, in particular for less advantaged groups;

(c) To support partnership between governmental and non-governmental bodies, including people's participation in national and regional governance to foster sustained human development;

(d) To mobilize and enhance institutions of civil society such as the private sector, non-governmental organizations, community organizations and family structures;

(e) To promote the cultural dimension of development.

18.14 In the area of the advancement of women, the objectives are:

(a) To follow up on the gender-related recommendations that emanated from the four world conferences referred to above;

(b) To provide support to the family as a basic unit of society and underscore family-related roles, values and identity;

(c) To sensitize society to gender-related issues, including partnership and participation, and raise awareness with regard to legislation and institutional support mechanisms;

(d) To assist in building capacities of non-governmental organizations as tools for monitoring and promoting the advancement of women.

18.15 In the area of human settlements, the objectives are:

(a) To monitor and identify problems resulting from rapid urbanization and social change;

(b) To promote understanding and raise awareness of the problems and needs of human settlements, in particular the provision of adequate and affordable housing and related services;

(c) To strengthen the capacity of Governments of the region in formulating appropriate policies and strategies for sustainable human settlement development.

Subprogramme 18.3 Economic development and global changes

18.16 The economic development of ESCWA member countries will be challenged by the rapidly unfolding regional and global economic changes emanating from the globalization of the world economy, new regional developments, including the economic implications of the Middle East peace process and an increasing trend towards market-oriented economies, including economic reform and structural adjustment measures.

18.17 The objectives of the subprogramme, which is implemented by the Economic Development Issues and Policies Division, are:

(a) To expand understanding of economic development with a view to enhancing macroeconomic management, international and intraregional trade, finance and domestic and foreign direct investment;

(b) To increase understanding of the impact of liberalization of economic activity and improve the preparedness of member States for participating in world economic arrangements (e.g. WTO/GATT, European Mediterranean Partnership);

(c) To identify modalities for enhancing regional financing infrastructures, with a view to facilitating intra-regional capital movements;

(d) To strengthen the capacity of member States to implement economic reform policies, financial management, privatization and deregulation measures.

Subprogramme 18.4 Coordination of policies and harmonization of norms and regulations for sectoral development

18.18 Regional economic cooperation, in the context of a prevailing global economic culture and environment, is predicated, in part, on the harmonization, at the regional level, of standards, norms and regulations, taking into consideration the implications of global treaties, conventions and standards. The harmonization of regional standards assumes special significance in the areas of transport, industry and technology.

18.19 The subprogramme, which is implemented by the Sectoral Issues and Policies Division, will focus on four areas: transport, industry, agriculture and technology.

18.20 The objectives in these areas are:

(a) Transport. To promote cooperation among member States based on improved transport operations and infrastructure policies, as well as harmonization of standards and the adoption of legal regimes for removing barriers impeding the streamlining and liberalization of border crossings and transit traffic;

(b) Industry. To improve the competitiveness of existing industries through the development of skills and policies, enhancing coordination and networking among national and regional support institutions and enabling industries to meet the requirements of regional and international standards, norms and regulations;

(c) Agriculture. To identify and promote appropriate agricultural strategies and practices in terms of agricultural management, resource conservation, and institution-building, and to identify areas that require harmonization of agricultural policies, regulations and norms, with a view to developing the agricultural potential of member States;

(d) Technology. To strengthen capabilities of member States in technology policy and effective transfer of technology, to strengthen their technological capacity and to promote research and development activities, their networking and linkages with the production sectors.

Subprogramme 18.5 Development, coordination and harmonization of statistics and information

18.21 Sound economic and social policy formulation and judicial decision-making are based on the availability, reliability and comparability of economic and social statistical data and their linkages. The formulation of appropriate development policies is also rooted in access to regional and international sources of information. Effective linkages of information and networking, in an era of globalization and sharing of information, have become essential components in the formulation of statistical strategies and have far-reaching effects on it.

18.22 The objectives of the subprogramme, which is to be implemented by the Statistics Division, are:

(a) To develop statistical systems of ESCWA member States, with a view of improving the relevance and accuracy of economic and social data;

(b) To expand the coverage of the subprogramme to new statistical areas, especially in the field of social statistics as required for the follow-up action on the implementation of the recommendations emanating from the above-mentioned world conferences;

(c) To promote the use of standardized reporting procedures and comparable statistics through the implementation of international statistical systems and programmes, in particular, the 1993 System of National Accounts, the International Comparison Programme and the 2000 round of population and housing censuses;

(d) To improve the reliability of statistical information and data and accessibility to them for planners and researchers;

(e) To develop statistical and textual databases in various socio-economic fields.